**The Alchemist: Questions for Class Discussion**

1. What is the significance of Santiago becoming a shepherd rather than a priest, as his parents had hoped? Why has he made this choice? What does being a shepherd allow him to do?

2. The novel begins with the boy deciding to spend the night with his flock in an abandoned church. The church has no roof and an enormous sycamore tree has grown up where the sacristy once stood. Why is it important that Santiago dreams of a child who tells him of his treasure in this particular setting?

3. King Mechizedek tells the boy that when we are children, "everything is clear and everything is possible," but as time passes mysterious forces convince us to abandon our dreams ~~(p. 23).~~ Do you think this is true? What are the "mysterious forces" that threaten to hold us back as we grow older?

4. The King also tells the boy that when you really desire something "all the universe conspires to help you find it" (p. 24). And he explains the principle of "favorability," or beginner’s luck. From whom does Santiago receive help on his journey? Have you ever benefited from beginner’s luck?

5. What tests and setbacks does the boy experience on his journey? Why is it important that he faces and overcomes these challenges? How would the novel be different if his quest was easier?

6. After he has been robbed of all his money in Tangier, how does Santiago choose to regard his situation? Did this surprise you? What allows him to understand his loss in this way?

7. What chain of events leads the boy to work at the crystal shop? What does he learn there? Why is he able to change and improve the shop, which has remained the same for many years? How is he different from the shop’s owner?

8. When Santiago begins his trek across the desert, he meets an Englishman who is a student of alchemy. In many ways they are alike: both are pursuing their "Personal Legends," both have encountered the ideas of alchemy. How is their approach to life and learning different? Why does the alchemist choose the boy as his pupil over the Englishman?

9. The Englishman tells Santiago that he would like to write "a huge encyclopedia just about the words luck and coincidence. It’s with those words that the universal language is written" ~~(p. 72).~~ The Swiss psychologist Carl Jung coined the term "synchronicity" to describe such moments of meaningful coincidence. When does Santiago experience this kind of synchronicity? What do these experiences reveal?

10. The alchemist says that "people become fascinated by pictures and words, and wind up forgetting the language of the world" ~~(p. 89).~~ What is this language of the world, or "universal language" as it is called elsewhere in the novel? How is it different than ordinary language? Is it spoken or expressed in some other way? Why would a fascination with words and pictures make people forget it?